

Last week, I co-authored an Op-Ed in the Capitol Hill publication *Roll Call* on the budget debate and the Congressional Progressive Caucus' budget proposal that I helped draft. I want to make sure all of you had an opportunity to read it:

When the debate over the fiscal 2012 budget began, the country — or, more accurately, the media — was focused on Rep. Paul Ryan's (R-Wis.) proposal. Introduced on behalf of the Republican House majority, our colleague's plan puts the interests of wealthy corporations first by slashing Medicare and Medicaid and spending trillions on a new corporate tax cut.

Indeed, cutting is all it seems to do. The Ryan plan slashes transportation investments in roads, bridges, rail lines, transit systems and airports by \$318 billion over the next 10 years. It cuts 1.7 million low-income students from Pell Grant eligibility. That's not a jobs plan — that's an economic death sentence.

The public isn't buying it. An April 17 Washington Post/ABC poll found what countless polls have told us before: An overwhelming majority (72 percent in this case) supports the highest earners paying more of their fair share in taxes as the best way to eliminate the national debt. There's good reason we saw this ThinkProgress headline April 20: "Paul Ryan Booed At Town Hall For Defending Tax Breaks For The Wealthy."

A serious conversation about our nation's fiscal future can't begin and end with a plan that the public finds too radical to support. That's why the Congressional Progressive Caucus introduced its People's Budget alternative April 15 on the floor of the House.

Our plan generates a government surplus within 10 years, by closing tax loopholes that let companies ship jobs overseas, eliminating expensive oil and gas subsidies, ending our wars abroad and creating jobs. Republicans tend to view the budget as a question of how to shrink rather than how to grow. The People's Budget allows the economy to grow by investing wisely, cutting prudently and ensuring that all people pay their fair share.

The budget should make the country stronger. Republicans keep telling us we have to “make tough choices,” “be responsible” and “take our medicine.” They’re all austerity and no prosperity. They never talk about how their budget actually creates jobs, or protects health care, or improves education, or upgrades infrastructure — because it doesn’t do any of those things.

The People’s Budget rolls back the irresponsible Bush-era tax giveaways and invests \$1.7 trillion in job training, infrastructure and other priorities that have languished for too long.

That’s why we’re calling on the Senate to take up the people’s values, and the People’s Budget, in the coming days and weeks. Especially popular elements, including a fairer tax code for millionaires and billionaires, would be potent messages back home as well as in the halls of Congress. It’s a no-brainer for our colleagues across the Hill, and it’s what the voters have already said they expect from us. When the Senate follows through, the whole country will reap the rewards.

The country needs a jobs plan, and the People’s Budget is a plan that will work. That’s why it’s already been endorsed by experts such as Jeffrey Sachs, Ph.D., of Columbia University, who wrote in a recent Huffington Post opinion piece that our budget is “humane, responsible, and most of all sensible, reflecting the true values of the American people and the real needs of the floundering economy.” Sachs doesn’t use these words lightly — the reason he’s been named one of Time magazine’s 100 Most Influential People twice is because he takes ideas seriously and means what he says.

So do we, and so should Rep. Ryan. His proposal has, curiously, been granted more credibility the more deeply it tears at the fabric of our nation. But demanding more sacrifice from a nation already reeling from a brutal recession isn’t a sign of seriousness or responsibility.

It’s time we give at least equal weight to a plan that takes job creation seriously, reflects the will of the American people and generates a government surplus in 10 years. According to a Gallup poll published March 31, the top two public preferences for improving the economy are “Stop sending jobs overseas” and “Create more infrastructure work.” Our budget does more than any other plan out there — we even create a new infrastructure investment bank so we can plan wisely for the new economy.

Republicans have rejected the growth model the American people strongly prefer. Our budget embraces it. There's no reason to hold our noses and vote for the Ryan proposal in the name of responsibility — it is a deeply irresponsible document. The People's Budget, in comparison, speaks for itself: a surplus in 10 years, an end to the wars that have drained our Treasury, a fairer and more transparent tax code and bold investments in job creation.

This conversation will continue long after Congress moves on from the budget vote. Our budget is a blueprint for American prosperity and fiscal responsibility. It is the People's Budget because it embraces the values and supports the interests of the American people.